

C.I.A.'s Work Unimpeded By Inquiries and Reports, Officials of Agency Assert

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 9.—Officials of the Central Intelligence Agency, despite repeated public avowals of diminished prestige and operational ability because of the various inquiries into intelligence operations, are convinced that the agency will suffer no serious loss of authority and no erosion of its ability to produce professional intelligence estimates and reports.

Key agency officials do not expect either the Senate or House Select Committee on Intelligence to recommend a ban on clandestine intelligence activities. Instead, they believe the committees will seek to impose more stringent controls on such operations, a compromise they feel will be welcomed by the agency.

In a series of recent interviews, a number of agency officials also expressed surprise at what they said was the inability of the Senate committee, headed by Senator Frank Church, Democrat of Idaho, to generate public support for its inquiry.

"Frank Church was the first TV show to close this fall," one senior agency aide said. "Mr. Church and his senior

aides took sharp exception to these views. They said that much of the committee's most important work was proceeding now in executive hearings and would, if consistent with national security requirements, be made public after the investigation ends next February.

All the agency officials interviewed agreed that the public criticism and official investigations following the published reports last December of widespread domestic spying by the agency had failed to hamper seriously its main function—the collection of worthwhile intelligence.

"At one point last February, William E. Colby, the recently ousted Director of Central Intelligence, testified that what he called 'exaggerated' charges of improper conduct had 'placed American intelligence in danger.'

"We've been looking for apparent, observable effects," one intelligence official said last week. "There are none."

He added, however, that agency officials were concerned about "the intangibles, that you

don't know what you're missing—the defector who doesn't defect, someone who doesn't tell you a wonderful story."

"But it's hard to say that we've lost much because of that," the official said.

Sources cited the following areas in which there has been some impairment of operations:

Some American companies that provided cover jobs for agents in the United States have curtailed their cooperation.

A small number of the large American corporations that permitted the C.I.A. to use foreign offices and branches for cover jobs have become less enthusiastic about permitting the agency to have direct access to employees overseas. The companies have requested that the agency conduct all its business with employees through a designated contact man.

Some of the agency's personnel still on clandestine assignments overseas have suffered from lowered morale and a confusion about what is permissible in the field. Everyone now has to check back home with his field officer, and this is taking away operational initiative in spot developments, one source said. Some agency officials said, however, that they did not think it was a bad idea to have men in the field checking in with superiors in such cases.

There has been some reluctance by various officials and operatives in foreign intelligence services to cooperate. "Some of our old-line contacts don't want to show up in our hearings or in our press," one source said. "But it just means that it's a little bit more difficult to undertake an operation with friendly operatives." He added that such operations were still feasible.

There have been scattered instances of less cooperation at high-level government-to-government interchanges of information. One high-level Ford Administration official said that some British intelligence officials "no longer tell us where they got information so we can evaluate the source, but only pass on the information. The Boston Globe reported last month that American officials were treating top-secret British information as being "on loan" to avoid the possibility of its being subpoenaed by Congress or the courts as "property" of the C.I.A.

But all the sources agreed that intelligence information, including the most sensitive flowing in.

"Things Are Tougher"

"Things are tougher, that's true," one official said. "But I haven't seen any evidence that things are compromised in terms of being able to function."

One high-level intelligence official said that the United States and other intelligence services occasionally held back things from each other, but that that was nothing new.

One senior Ford Administration official, asked for his assessment of potential damage to intelligence operations, complained about the continued disclosure to Congress of internal documents relating to agency plots to assassinate foreign leaders and other clandestine operations. The official said he was concerned that future Presidents and intelligence chiefs might be restricted because of the fear that successors would make certain data public.

Aside from that, however, the official said he knew of no instance in which the agency's ability to produce intelligence had been adversely affected by the Congressional hearings.

One high-level agency source did say that one European politician had recently turned down covert financing of a political campaign. The official refused to supply further information, and it was impossible to gauge how widespread such refusals of secret aid were.

A Frequent Question

One agency official conceded that a factor in the dispute over how much, if any, damage had been done to C.I.A. operations in the last 10 months was that Congress had repeatedly asked the same question in recent hearings.

Last Wednesday, William Nelson, the C.I.A.'s director of operations, was asked for his views on the matter by Representative David C. Treen, Republican of Louisiana, during House hearings.

Mr. Nelson said that some American citizens and agents abroad had refused to cooperate for fear of being exposed. He said that "there has been a good deal of apprehension" in foreign intelligence services about continuing their relationships with the C.I.A.

"I don't want to overexaggerate this, however," Mr. Nelson added. "The agency is still functioning abroad, and I think it's doing rather effectively."

Colby Praised

A number of agency officials said that a major concern did develop over the publication earlier this year of "Inside the Company," a book by Philip Agee, a former agency operative, describing clandestine agency activity in Latin America and naming C.I.A. covert agents and their undercover contacts.

The book led to serious problems for some operatives, intelligence officials said. They added, however, that no similar information had leaked from the Congressional intelligence committees.

If a central complaint did emerge during the interviews, which were initiated before the ouster of Mr. Colby last week-end, it was repeated concern about a loss of moral within the agency because of the widespread public criticism of its domestic spying and some of its clandestine overseas activity.

Some officials, though, discounted the significance of morale inside any bureaucracy. One high-level Administration official said that morale had been bad inside the State Department for 25 years "but they still do their job."

But those officials who were bothered by a loss of morale said that President Ford's summary dismissal of Mr. Colby, who had been Director of Central Intelligence since 1973, had created a uniting surge of sympathy for Mr. Colby in the agency.

One Colby associate said that the director initially planned to leave the post last Wednesday — he later agreed to stay through the end of the year — after signing 70 supergrade promotions that had been authorized and to award the promotions at a ceremony.

More than 500 senior C.I.A. officials gathered Wednesday for the ceremony in the auditorium on the agency's grounds near Washington.

"Colby walks in," one eyewitness recalled, "and all of a sudden everyone jumps up and applause begins. It lasted five minutes, with Colby trying to shut it off. Now everyone [inside the agency] is saying that Colby died for our sins."

Mr. Colby has been widely praised for his consistent efforts to cooperate with the various investigating committees that were set up this year, although his approach is known to have angered many associates and friends of Richard Helms, who was director of the C.I.A. when it was engaged in domestic spying.

One mild demurrer to the general praise for Mr. Colby's candor came from Representative Otis G. Pike, Democrat of Suffolk, who is chairman of the House intelligence committee. Mr. Pike told Mr. Colby during a hearing: "It has been my own experience that if you are asked the right question, you will give an honest answer. You do not make it easy for us to ask the right question."

When the House and Senate committees began summoning agency witnesses, one Colby admirer said: "You had the making of a potentially disastrous situation. And yet by playing it straight, and by trying to get the material out, the agency has finally come into the 20th century. They now know that acts of wrongdoing must be turned over to the Department of Justice."

A number of agency men praised Mitchell Rogovin, a Washington lawyer hired by Mr. Colby to aid the agency in its presentations before Congress.

Sources said that Mr. Rogovin constantly and successfully urged Mr. Colby and others to turn over voluntarily evidence of wrongdoing as a means of keeping the Congressional investigations on the defensive.

"Part of the problem of being in our culture," one middle-level agency official said in explaining why many in the agency were reluctant to make any information public, "is that compartmentalization is one of the fundamental disciplines—the idea is to limit the damage in case the K.G.B. [the Soviet secret intelligence service] penetrates the agency. This becomes part of the ritual, and some of the things we thought would be abhorrent to the American public [upon disclosure] 'are things the people have to put up with day after day.'"

Raw Files Provided

One official said in an interview two weeks ago that Justice Department officials were being provided with direct access to the agency's raw files. At least one Justice Department inquiry, into allegations that Mr. Helms committed perjury while testifying before Congress, is known to still be under review.

Other agency officials also expressed the view that the relatively few new issues raised thus far by the Congressional committees were based entirely on documents and evidence supplied by the agency.

Nothing has been unearthed by the committee that hasn't been discovered by the agency and stopped," one source said.

Senator Church said today in a televised interview that his committee's report would contain "some new information about the agency's assassination plot."

The official added that the basic working document utilized by the blue-ribbon commission set up by President Ford and headed by Vice President Rockefeller for its investigation and report in June was the internal C.I.A. dossier on domestic abuses assembled in May 1973 at the request of James R. Schlesinger, then the C.I.A. director, who was dismissed last week as Secretary of Defense.

Some agency officials speculated that the Schlesinger report did not include all the agency's domestic wrongdoing, but they doubted that the intelligence committees would be able to develop significant new material. "Fine operatives, the Schlesinger report has been denounced as the 'vomit report,' a reference

to the fact that agency employees volunteered much of the information about the domestic violations to Mr. Schlesinger's office. There are still some men in the agency, a highly reliable source said, who pride themselves on 'having stronger stomachs.'"

There is no evidence that Mr. Colby or any other official has authorized further inquiries into domestic wrongdoing, although the existence of such attitudes is reported to be wide throughout the agency.

Two middle-level C.I.A. officials who are now serving in key managerial positions in the agency expressed disappointment in the public proceedings of the Church committee.

Some Basic Questions

"A lot of basic questions about intelligence and its need haven't been aired, and that's too bad," one said. The other complained that the Church committee had not begun to examine publicly the "fundamental" issue of covert operations.

A more senior intelligence official wondered whether what he felt was the failure of the Congressional investigations to deal with the more substantial issues would not provoke yet another inquiry into intelligence in some future Congress.

"The Senate had the staff," one agency source said, "but it got too bogged down in the assassinations."

He said that thus far the Church committee had yet to fix firmly a schedule for public hearings on the agency's covert activities in Chile, where at least \$8 million was spent to prevent the election of Salvador Allende Gossens in 1970 and, failing that, to attempt to make it more difficult for Mr. Allende's regime to govern.

Mr. Allende was overthrown by a military junta in September 1973 and was either killed or committed suicide.

A number of agency men believe that the House intelligence committee has publicly examined more basic questions dealing with the capability of the C.I.A. to make accurate intelligence assessments.

One former agency official said: "The House goes after the arteries, while the Senate goes after the capillaries."

The Senate committee was known to be engaged in an intense dispute over Senator Church's desire to stage extensive public hearings on the C.I.A.'s role in Chile.

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Opposition on Panel

Sources close to the committee said that opposition from Republicans and some Democrats on the nine-member panel had prevented Mr. Church from going forward this week with full-scale public hearings. As of last Friday, the sources said, the Senators had been unable to agree how long the hearings, if public, should last and which witnesses should be summoned.

Defenders of the Senate committee, including Mr. Church, concede that the public hearings have failed to arouse strong public interest, but they insist that the committee should not be judged until it completes its work.

A number of sources said that the assassination report, scheduled to be released in two weeks, reaches no definite conclusions about who authorized what in Cuba, Chile, the Congo and the Dominican Republic. The report, however, is said to contain the most detailed information ever assembled outside the C.I.A. on how covert operations are initiated and carried out.

Mr. Church is known to be sensitive to the charges that he sought to obtain personal publicity by publicly investigating such seemingly dramatic but less significant issues as

the failure of some low-level agency official to destroy lethal toxin stocks after a direct Presidential order to do so in late 1969.

The Senator said in a recent telephone interview that such accusations were "groundless" and added: "The assassination matter would have been unprecedented box office. It would have been the most sensational hearings held in this century. I was against bringing this out because I thought it would have caused damage" to the nation.

'Headline-Grabbing' Denied

"It's just unconscionable to turn around and say that the committee is headline-grabbing," Mr. Church added.

Similarly, William G. Miller, staff director of the Church committee inquiry, said in a telephone interview that 30 investigators and attorneys had been working since early this year on what he said was one of the central issues in the investigation: Are you going to have covert operations and under what conditions and what controls?

Thus far, Mr. Miller said, the staff dealing with that issue has been meeting privately and may be forced to conclude its work with relatively little information made public.

Mr. Miller conceded that "the things that have been made public are not as important in the long run, but it takes a lot of maturity and strength to realize that the way you get to the gut issues is to handle them in executive session."

He added that the Senators on the committee had to make decisions and attempt to balance "what the public should know against national security."

"In every major area of inquiry," he said, "the more information there is, the greater the sense of having to weigh carefully the issue of secrecy versus national security."

He described the committee's major goal as ensuring that the nation got a new legislative charter for regulating the activities of its needed intelligence agencies.

agencies.

"We're trying to put intelligence within the constitutional framework," he said. "That's the major work of the committee, and it won't be seen until February."

Differing Views Voiced

Other Senate staffers, including some senior member of Mr. Church's committee, expressed differing views.

"The committee has not been willing to hang tough and fight the Administration" on access to documentation, one committee said. "It's frittered away the psychological and moral leverage you journalists gave them [early this year]—when everyone was afraid of a cover-up."

Another committee source complained that Senator Church and Mr. Miller "have the notion that if you go quietly, in the end you'll come up with some worthwhile remedies" for the intelligence community.

"People will say you're terribly reasonable, but that's only because you haven't found out anything," the source said.

Whenever there was a real "crunch in the area of domestic abuses, the source said, the committee was "manhandled" by the agency; it never subpoenaed or threatened to subpoena documents, and it "didn't go beyond what was reported by journalists."

Another Senate aide with experience in high-level national security matters described the widely circulated newspaper photographs of Senator Church holding a C.I.A. dart gun during a public hearing as "the essence of the Church approach."

"There was a way to do the job but it wouldn't have gotten headlines," the aide said. "The C.I.A. is going to come out of this better off because everyone will think things have been dug up and investigated."

"It was the best chance Congress ever had."